

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

CHANGES IN THE MEDICARE PART B PROGRAM FOR FEHBP MEMBERS

HON. ROBERT A. BORSKI

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 29, 1995

Mr. BORSKI. I rise today to express my concern about the proposed changes in the Medicare part B prescription drug benefit program for our Federal employees and retirees.

Effective January 1, 1996, many Federal retirees receiving medical benefits through Blue Cross/Blue Shield will be forced to obtain their prescription drugs from mail-order drug companies or be required to pay an additional 20 percent copayment for their prescription drugs acquired from their neighborhood druggist. As a result, over 1 million of our Nation's seniors may no longer be able to afford to have the convenience and security of receiving their prescription drugs from their neighborhood, preferred-network pharmacies.

On January 1, Federal employees and retirees who receive retail pharmacy benefits from the Medicare part B program of the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program [FEHBP] Blue Cross/Blue Shield standard option will no longer have their 20-percent coinsurance drug deductible waived if they choose to receive their drugs from their local pharmacy. Only those members who receive their prescription drugs through mail-order drug companies will be entitled to retain the waiver available under current law. As a result, many of our Nation's retired Federal employees will no longer be able to afford the safety and convenience of receiving their prescription drugs from their neighborhood druggists.

Mr. Speaker, by raising the cost of prescription drugs by 20 percent, Blue Cross/Blue Shield is economically forcing many of our Nation's seniors into receiving their prescription drugs from anonymous mail-order drug companies. By removing trusted, local druggists from the picture, Blue Cross/Blue Shield is creating a potentially dangerous situation for many of our retired Federal employees.

First, Federal retirees, like most senior citizens, use prescription drugs more frequently than any other age group. Many of the drugs taken by the elderly are so dramatically important that should a senior citizen mistakenly forget to reorder his or her medication, or accidentally spill the medication in the sink, the consequences of not being able to acquire or afford immediate replacement of the prescription would be life threatening.

In addition, senior citizens are more likely to be taking multiple drugs at the same time. Many seniors require the face-to-face attention and recordkeeping provided by pharmacists to ensure that their medications are being properly administered and that there are no adverse reactions among their prescriptions. However, unlike community pharmacies, many mail-order firms do not maintain complete patient medication records, which means that they cannot check for or prevent any potential serious medication problems.

A recent study by the U.S. General Accounting Office [GAO] entitled "Prescription Drugs and the Elderly" noted that health practitioners are in agreement that in order for our Nation's elderly to receive safe and effective care, physicians, pharmacists, and patients should all participate in the drug therapy decisionmaking process through increased communication. However, mail-order prescriptions do not allow this type of face-to-face communication and accurate recordkeeping which is essential to prevent dangerous mistakes with prescription drugs.

Finally, Blue Cross/Blue Shield has stated the proposed elimination of the prescription drug waiver for Federal retirees was a result of "working hard to create a balance between providing an overall comprehensive benefits package for [its FEHBP] members and keeping [its] premiums competitive."

However, this decision seemingly ignores the fact that increasing the medicinal risk to many seniors by removing local druggists could have a drastic effect on the health care costs for everyone. According to the GAO study, nearly one of four ambulatory elderly patients were taking prescription medication in an inappropriate manner which led to unnecessary adverse reactions and higher medical costs amounting to \$20 billion a year. By further increasing the risk of medicinal accident to the elderly, there is no estimate as to the likely increase in medical costs.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, considering the unnecessary risk that would be imposed on many of our Nation's retired Federal employees as a result of a simple cost-cutting measure, it is unwise and inappropriate to place the protection of the neighborhood pharmacist out of the economic range for many of our Nation's retired Federal employees.

A TRIBUTE TO CLEVELAND ROBINSON

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 29, 1995

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Cleveland Robinson, leader of District 65 of the United Auto Workers Union in New York City who recently passed away. Cleveland Robinson committed his life to economic justice and racial equality. As a union representative, he fought to improve the lives of the mostly black and Hispanic New York City autoworkers whom he represented. Committed to racial justice in the United States and internationally, Mr. Robinson also served as the administrator chairman of the 1963 March on Washington and helped to bring American Labor into the fight against South African apartheid. Mr. Robinson's commitment to justice was deeply held and his contribution to social justice was great.

In memory of Cleveland Robinson and in tribute to the ideals for which he fought, I

would like to enter into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD the following excerpts from a statement by Bernice Powell Jackson from the Civil Rights Journal.

No one could attend Cleveland Robinson's funeral, held at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, and not be awed. There was the grandeur of the church, the power of the African drummers leading the procession and there was the procession itself. In it were Jesse Jackson, Andrew Young, Coretta Scott King, David Dinkins and Harry Belafonte. In it were labor leader like Bill Lucy and Owen Bieber and union members whom Cleveland Robinson had spent a life-time representing. In it were church leaders and civic leaders and Robinson family members. In it were the Consul General and Ambassador from Robinson's native Jamaica. It was an awesome moment.

Cleveland Robinson's name is not a household word. Yet, he was a man whose unswerving commitment to the working people of our country led to the improvement of the lives of the 30,000 mostly black and Hispanic workers in small shops and department stores whom he represented. He was a man whose dedication to fighting injustice, especially racial injustice, led him to be a loyal and fearless supporter of the civil rights movements in the United States and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa.

It was Cleveland Robinson who served as the administrator chairman of the 1963 March on Washington. In her remarks at his funeral, Mrs. King remembered his long-time support for Dr. King and the civil rights movement, dating back to the 1956 Montgomery bus boycott. Indeed, many in the movement knew that you always could count on Cleveland Robinson for moral and financial support and "troops" when you confronted racism.

It was the same in the anti-apartheid movement, where Cleveland Robinson played a key role in getting labor support of anti-apartheid activities. He helped to organize the 1986 anti-apartheid rally in New York City where nearly a million marched and let our national leaders know they no longer had public support for U.S. backing of a racist regime. For that reason President Nelson Mandela sent a personal message to Robinson's funeral.

Mr. Robinson's contribution to America was powerful, and I would like to take this moment to honor his memory and to mourn our loss.

TRIBUTE TO TOM LAZZARO

HON. CARRIE P. MEEK

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 29, 1995

Mrs. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of honoring a colleague of mine who is retiring on December 3, 1995. After giving of himself 30 years of continued and dedicated service to the cognitive and affective growth of thousands of students at Miami-Dade Community College, he now seeks a well-deserved retirement from leading and teaching so many of the college's increasing number of prominent alumni.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.